

Guest questions

AZA RMC Aggression Management Webinar Series



Webinar 4: Housing & Husbandry Approaches



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For everyone:

Q: It seems that in some cases we have to re-think some of the rules. For example, we can't split up a group because it could affect the dominance hierarchy or we can't provide dead ends. Can the panelists comment on how maybe you dealt with these kinds of issues? (David Powell)

A1: For me, looking at the natural behavior of the species as the reason for the "against the norm" methods has worked. I would never have thought to offer dead ends for meerkats until I saw the need and thought about how they defend themselves naturally using bolt holes. (Katie Kimble)

A2: For Diana (Monkeys), we actually wanted to affect dominance hierarchy in some circumstances. For example, while our dominant male was recovering alone, our dominant female and submissive females created a stronger bond with each other, which caused our male to drop in status. So, we used fission fusion to break those bonds to help him get reintegrated back into the group.

For dead ends, we tried to limit places that they could be cornered which meant giving them a little less space at times but more routes to move around the exhibit. (Deidre Timms & Tabitha Brown)

A3: For all of our small primates we have tried to respect and support the dominance hierarchies we have. When we separate our colobus we never separate our sexually mature male offspring from our dominant male for more than a day or two to ensure that he still respects his father's dominance. In terms of dead ends, we are very lucky in our building layout that we can have no dead ends in many different iterations without reducing too much space, but we will reduce space to ensure lack of dead ends when aggression occurs. (Caroline Schleimer)

Q: How do you increase your threshold for aggression AND explain the wounds to your public? (Donald Moore)

A: We let our non-animal staff know that we have wounding in the group, offer to speak with guests about their concerns, or put a graphic up to let guests know we are aware of the wounds and the animals are under veterinary care. (Katie Kimble) Also answered live by Katie Kimble and Caroline Schleimer.

Q: Have you had any issues with USDA inspectors being intolerant of some mild wounds/aggression in groups where they are working out a social dynamic? We have and it can hinder our management options. (Victoria Milne)

A: Answered live by Tina Cloutier-Barbour, Ashley Roberts, and Rebecca Young.

Q: Where did the concept of fission fusion animal management come from? (James Ballance)

A: Answered live by Tina Cloutier-Barbour.

For Katie Kimble:

Q: How do you differentiate foraging opportunities that promote positive social interactions from those that create competition? What's the best way to design those opportunities? (David Powell)

A: When you offer these types of foraging opportunities when the group is stable, you can identify what may increase aggression or start low or moderate levels of aggression and, conversely, what brings the group together. You don't want to offer a foraging opportunity for the first time when you have escalated instability.

For Ashley Roberts:

Q: Can you give an example of a behavior related to aggression that might have triggered one of your "experiences"? (David Powell)

A: When the dynamic escalates from sparring to more of an aggressive interaction (like if one male starts pursuing others after sparring episodes) would trigger us to launch into a zone feed experience, for example. The goal was to switch their focus and momentum from those escalating aggressive behaviors to exploration behaviors, while reducing the opportunities to guard specific resources and the resulting pre-aggression behaviors that tends to encourage.

Q: How was the hypothetical animal and predator presence scenarios set up? Scents primarily? (Anonymous)

A: Yes. We paired the scents with resource changes. Basically, we would introduce the scent of the hypothetical male into one zone, and in that zone all of the resources would be depleted. We could then move the hypothetical male scent around to the different zones and manipulate the resources as if that male were acting upon their habitat. Same thing with the predator, although we usually followed the hypothetical male with the predator, as if the predator preyed upon the interloper. And then the resources would be returned to their "normal" levels.